Jay Lambda Library Center

Gay Fathers of Sacramento

Vol. 2 No. 8 AUGUST 1997

"Each man's life represents a road toward himself." --Herman Hesse

President's Corner By Ed Callahan

'Walking Each Other Home'

We were little then. Not many of the boys stayed in that area of the play yard— guess it was the girls' area. But Freddie and I played there, not fully knowing we shouldn't, just enjoying each other's company. Even though this was only first grade, we knew we couldn't play at each other's homes because he was black and I was not. So many things to divide us.

That moment came back last weekend as we did an exercise in a workshop – we started out as a multiracial and multicultural group – five lines, ten people wide each, holding hands. "Everyone ever called a name because of your race, take one step back." "Everyone who took a vacation out of state before 15, take one step forward." Step by step, I hung onto the young Puerto Rican woman next to me, trapping a distraught African American woman from the row ahead trying to comply with the instructions to take yet another step back. We clung tightly, not yet knowing we were both "Family", but it couldn't be. Just as I lost my friend from first grade, I lost my friend of 60 minutes last Saturday. As I stood in the mostly white and privileged end of the room, I looked across what seemed miles, to the mostly African American and Latino group. I couldn't feel anything just then. I watched the tears and heard the sobbing, but all I felt was remote, defensive, and maybe guilty. I had learned the first time through in this life to deny the pain that unwanted separation brings. It was easy to shut off feeling early last Saturday – hadn't I learned how to do that growing up as fewer and fewer of my friends of color were in my classroom year by year until their absence from my Catholic college campus almost seemed natural. Damage to the white and privileged end of the room was not as visible or audible, but it was there: deep painful slices drawn out of the soul each time a person of color and their spirit dissappeared from sight and consciousness. But white guys are good at learning not to cry, not to show pain, right?

What followed Saturday was an incredibly painful and powerful journey into 50 souls of all colors and types. No birth is without pain; this birth of hope was the first birth I went through where I felt excruciating pain minute by minute. We gathered in Oakland, California to begin to first recognize and then start to unlearn racism in ourselves. We were also there to learn to facilitate discussions around the film "The Color of Fear", a very powerful piece. If you can see it, do so. The time is right. Lee Mun Wah, a Chinese American psychologist, facilitated both the all male group who discuss the impact of race on their lives in the film and the group of 50 I grew to love intensely during my four-day experience. Mun Wha is about to introduce a second film: "Walking Each Other Home: The Color of Fear II." This coming year, President Clinton is discussing endorsement of the film to facilitate talk about racism and how it damages all of us. The Episcopalian Church and the Unitarian-Universalist Church are on board to distribute the film and facilitate the grass roots discussion; even the hierarchy of my long abandoned Roman Catholic faith is considering coming on board to address this festering issue.

So why is an openly gay man writing about this? The ground rules of the workshop excluded the discussion of homophobia, sexism and other oppressions lest it deflect us from dealing with racism. But the people in the workshop cared about homophobia and spoke with me and the out lesbians who were there. They chose to be our allies. Although my friend Freddie and I did not have the words or skills to talk about our experience back on the school yard in first grade, we got messages about being different and being *less-than*. I have always felt that my experience growing up as a gay child linked me to the experience of everyone who has been called less-than for being different. I may have lacked the verbal skills and courage to link hands as often as the opportunity

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Don't Forget!

Monthly meeting
Sunday Aug. 10 at 6 p.m.
at the Lambda Center
919 20th Street
Sacramento

GFS meets the second Sunday of each month.

Gay Fathers of Sacramento
Support Network
PO Box 161951
Sacramento,CA 95816-1951
Phone: (916) 456-DADS (3237)

Father's Forum by Mark Winniger

I AM I!

At the age of nine I discovered I was gay without even knowing what gay was. It was a wonderful time of my life, filled with innocence and boyhood wonder. During fourth and fifth grade I was lucky to have met a boy my age who was also gay and lived just down the street. He was my first crush and my last as a healthy gay person. Even at that age I knew that what was special between us was not approved by others. We kept our boyhood romance a secret, each feeling safe with the other.

As I entered seventh grade and began to mix with teens, I started to hide myself and fill my life with shame, fear and embarrassment. I was fighting to cope and live. Thoughts of suicide became a common daily occurrence. I lost friends and could never trust anyone. If they knew my true nature they would hate me, or worse. My family would stop loving me. I forced myself to live straight in order to live. I prayed that God would forgive me and make me straight. For nearly thirty years I lived in the shadows of my soul.

In 1983 I put a pistol to my head. Only the thought of my children finding me helped me to call for help. That was the start of many counseling sessions. But no matter what I did, I knew I was gay and my shame and fear stopped me from dealing with the real reason for my problems. The walls that I had built to hold out the world to protect myself had become the walls of my imprisonment.

This August will be the end of my first year since coming out. It has been a journey filled with joy and freedom as well as fears and anxiety. I have joined groups such as Gay Fathers and the Men's Coming Out group. The first time I ever let anyone know my real name and that I was gay was at a Gay Fathers Meeting. Without them I would not have made so many new friends to help in my support nor would I have had the opportunity to help others. I have also been reading books on gay life and coming out, from Stanley Siegel's *Uncharted Lives*, Brian McNaught's *On Being Gay*, to Michelangelo Signorile's *Outing Yourself* and Craig Nelson's *Finding True Love In A Man-Eat-Man World.*

I have come out to all of my family including my ex-wife and children and to neighbors, friends and coworkers. I have made loving my gayness such a part of my life that I consider only those that know and accept me as I am as true friends. The freedom is exhilarating. I am gradually finding great joy in who I am and loving myself is the greatest feeling I have ever had since I began to hide myself in shame as a young boy. I no longer need to hide in the shadows of my soul, I am tearing down the walls. I have been very lucky, no one has rejected me. I am loved for who I am. This is new for my family and there is still an adjustment being made as I find my new role in the family and they become accustomed to it.

Each day I look in the mirror and look forward to finding the wonderful, real, gay me. Each day is an adventure into gay culture and life. Each day I bring life to that which I tried to kill to survive. Now I live because I love and embrace this part of myself. Each day I am becoming bolder at showing my gayness. Or am I simply becoming more loving of myself and feeling less shame? I wish my parents were alive today, that they could know how wonderful a person I am turning out to be.

Perhaps the words which best captures my life today is found in *Happy Birthday To You* by Dr. Seuss:

"I AM I!, Me! I am I! And I may not know why. But I know that I like it. Three Cheers! I AM I!" ▼

(CALLAHAN, from page 1)
presented, but my gayness has been a gift to allow me to link to others who are told they are less-than, a gift it will take a full lifetime to appreciate and use fully. My being gay was something I could and still can make invisible if I grow tired of dealing with homophobia. Being a person of color is something that our allies can never lay down, no matter how tired they become.

Our struggle to defeat homophobia is often a difficult and ugly task. When taking on this task we can also sign on to fight all oppression; if we refuse, the price is exacted day by day from our souls. One small step in learning how we can be better allies to our gay and lesbian family members of color and their straight families of origin is watching and learning from "The Color of Fear" if we have the chance. Whether you have the chance to do that or not, watch for "Walking Each Other Home". See it. Discuss it. Remember, once the Nazis came for Jews, Gypsies and gays – minorities need to fight for one another if we are ever to create a world safe for all of our children. ▼

(Brief) News Clips ...

Cunanan Manhunt Ends with Suspect's Suicide

MIAMI BEACH — The nationwide manhunt for Andrew Cunanan is over. The suspected killer of five men, including world renown fashion designer Gianni Versace, was found dead in a houseboat from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. The boat was moored on an inter-coastal waterway 2 1/2 miles from where Versace was gunned down.

Reintroduced ERA Stands Little Chance of Passage

WASHINGTON — The San Francisco Chronicle reports that passage of the recently reintroduced Equal Rights Amendment in Congress, which would amend the US Constitution to prohibit discrimination based on gender, stands an even smaller chance of passage now than when it was first cleared for state ratification by Congress 25 years ago.

McCurry Issues White House Clarification

WASHINGTON — Responding to a protest issued by the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, and in an attempt to mend badly strained ties with the gay community as a whole, the White House on Monday issued a "clarification" of statements made in response to a recent federal court ruling governing lesbian and gay service in the military.

Gay Couples File Suit in Vermont for Right to Wed

BURLINGTON, Vt — The Boston Globe reports three gay couples filed suit in Vermont on Tuesday claiming the state constitution entitles them the right to legally marry. The lawsuit puts the state of Vermont in the forefront of the national debate over lesbian and gay marriage.

Same-Sex Benefits Have Little Impact on Business Costs

WASHINGTON — The Honolulu Advertiser reports a recent study conducted by the Washington-based Employee Benefit Research Institute shows the cost of extending medical benefits to gay and lesbian couples poses a far smaller cost to businesses that many claim.

Pro-Gay Moderate Elected to Head Episcopal Church

PHILADELPHIA — The San Francisco Chronicle reports the newly elected head of the Episcopal Church has been handed a difficult mandate: stop the loss of members and money; and heal the denomination's widening internal divisions over gay rights and the rights of women in the church.

Clinton Meets with Lesbian & Gay Community Leaders

WASHINGTON — President Clinton on Tuesday met with twelve gay and lesbian advocates for a briefing on a range of gay-related concerns, the Associated Press reports.

No Sex Life for "Ellen" Yet, Says Network

HOLLYWOOD, Ca. — The Associated Press reports ABC Television, having emerged largely unscathed for allowing Ellen DeGeneres to bring her "Ellen" character out of the closet in prime-time, might one day be convinced to let Ellen Morgan go one step further and have an on-air sex life.

Gay Palimony Suit in Florida

WEST PALM BEACH, Fl. — United Press International reports a gay palimony suit now being heard in West Palm Beach has the potential to become a landmark case for lesbian and gay couples in Florida. ▼

Poetry & Quotations ...

(South African president Nelson Mandella chose this quote from New Age writer Marianne Williamson for his innaugural address. It was submitted by Ed Callahan.)

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.
We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous.

Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God.
Your playing small doesn't serve the world.
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking
so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.
It is not just in some of us, it's in everyone, and as we let our own light shine,
we consciously give other people permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

[POEM]

IN A DARK TIME

In a dark time, the eye begins to see,
I meet my shadow in the deepening shade;
I hear my echo in the echoing wood —
A lord of nature weeping to a tree.
I live between the heron and the wren,
Beasts of the hill and serpents of the den.

What's madness but nobility of soul
At odds with circumstance? The day's on fire!
I know the purity of pure despair,
My shadow pinned against a sweating wall.
That place among the rocks — is it a cave,
Or winding path? The edge is what I have.

A steady storm of correspondences!
A night flowing with birds, a ragged moon,
And in broad day the midnight come again!
A man goes far to find out what he is —
Death of the self in a long, tearless night,
All natural shapes blazing unnatural light.

Dark, dark my light, and darker my desire.
My soul, like some heat-maddened summer fly,
Keeps buzzing at the sill. Which I is I?
A fallen man, I climb out of my fear.
The mind enters itself, and God the mind,
And one is One, free in the tearing wind.

By Theodore Roethke (American Poet, 1906-63, suicide)

"I exist as I am, that is enough."
-- Walt Whitman

"Our deepest fears are like dragons guarding our deepest treasures." -- Rainer Maria Rilke

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"Live all you can. It's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have had your life. If you haven't had that, what have you had? Live! -- Henry James

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"This above all else, to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man." -- Shakesphere

"You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free."
-- Bible

"Truth like a bastard comes into the world
Never without ill-fame to him who gives her birth."
-- Thomas Hardy borrowing a line from Milton.

"Donde está la verdad está Dios." (Where truth is, there is God.) -- Cervantes

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"When in doubt tell the truth."
-- Mark Twain